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ABSTRACT

A forensics mentor is a person of greater rank, experience, or expertise who teaches, guides, and develops a person less experienced in the forensics profession. Interviews show that coaches and directors favor mentoring, and feel that it is desirable to the forensics community. In considering the applicability of mentoring to forensics, however, educators must note that questions and concerns exist about both the practice of mentoring and the research conducted to date on mentoring relationships. Possible drawbacks or dangers include relationships that are exploitive, stifling or overprotective. The second National Development Conference on Individual Events has offered the following three recommendations for successfully establishing mentoring in forensics: (1) establish formal mentoring programs; (2) expand the existence of informal mentoring; and (3) expand the promotion function which mentoring can serve for less experienced forensics coaches. Ex-forensics directors are a potentially untapped resource for fulfilling the mentoring role. Some issues must be considered, however, when considering their use as mentors. First, ex-directors are unlikely to be good mentors if they were not good mentors when they were active directors. Second, they must be ready to relinquish the power and control associated with the director's position. Third, there is a question as to whether individuals who are no longer active in coaching can remain in touch. Finally, ex-directors may not be effective mentors unless they make an effort to be cognizant of potential problems and issues associated with mentoring. (Fourteen references are attached.) (PRA)

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The Role of the Ex-forensics Director as a Mentor

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INTRODUCTION

At the second National Developmental Conference on Individual Events in August of 1990 Cindy Larson-Casselton and I presented a paper entitled, "Mentoring Relationships and Programs: Applications to the Forensics Community". The paper was interested in addressing two questions. First, to what extent do mentoring relationships exist in the forensics community? Second, would it be desirable for the forensics community to formally or informally encourage mentoring relationships, practices, or programs? In 1991 our SCA panel is interested in examining roles which Ex-forensics Directors may assume that would be of potential benefit to the forensics activity. It seems quite natural consequently to pose the question, is the role of mentor a desirable role for Ex-forensics Directors?

In attempting to answer that question a summary of the work compiled for the second National Developmental Conference on mentoring will be presented and then extended by addressing issues which are raised specifically when Ex-forensics Directors are considered to fulfill mentor roles. Organizationally the paper will be divided into four parts. First, basic definitions and approaches to mentoring will be presented. Second, a brief summary of semi-nondirected interviews with forensics coaches concerning their thoughts about and experiences with mentoring will be discussed. Third, some conclusions about the applicability of mentoring practices and programs to the forensics community will be offered. Finally, specific issues

which are raised by the idea of Ex-forensics Directors as mentors will be discussed.

DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES

The concept of mentoring is actually quite old. Noonan (1980) suggests that the term was probably first introduced in Greek mythology when "Mentor", the faithful friend of Odysseus, was entrusted to care for Odysseus' son. In the last fifteen years, however, mentoring has truly emerged as a topic of interest in a variety of settings ranging from business to teaching. Much of the recent interest in mentoring can probably be traced in part to a survey published by Roche in the Harvard Business Review in 1979 in which over 4,000 top executives in the United States were interviewed concerning their experiences with mentoring relationships. When over two-thirds of those responding reported involvement in mentoring relationships and rewards ranging from increased salary and promotions to increased job satisfaction, other researchers started to take note and formal and informal mentoring programs started springing up. (Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike and Newnan, 1984)

A review of the mentoring literature quickly reveals that mentoring has been defined in a variety of ways. Levinson et. al. (1978) offer one of the most restricted definitions suggesting: (1) that a mentor is a teacher, sponsor, counselor, developer of skills and intellect, host, guide and example; (2) that a mentor's most crucial function is to support and facilitate the realization of a dream; (3) that a mentor

synthesizes the characteristics of a parent-child relationship and peer support without being either; and (4) that a mentor relationship is an intense form of "love", that lasts two or three years (at most ten) and possesses an 8-15 year age difference between mentor and protege. Roche (1979) on the other hand defines a mentor as someone who takes a personal interest in a person's career or who guides or sponsors a person. For the purposes of this paper, a forensics mentor will be defined as a person of greater rank, experience, or expertise who teaches, guides and develops a more novice person in the forensics profession. (Altman, Cochran, Doverspike, and Newnan, 1984, p. 327)

Actual applications of mentoring indicate further that it is possible to operationally define mentoring in two ways. Daloz (1986) uses a travel metaphor to distinguish the two approaches. First, a mentor can be viewed as a person who makes a map for a protege. The mentor knows all the right people and the right paths to take. The mentor is a tour guide who has the travel tips necessary to smooth out a lot of bumps on a protege's professional road. It is also possible, however, to view a mentor as a trusted guide who is more interested in developing the traveler as opposed to fixing the road. The ultimate goal is to help assure that the protege becomes a competent traveler who can traverse assorted roads in the future.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Semi-nondirected interviews were conducted in the summer of 1990 to try to ascertain the prevalence and nature of mentoring

relationships in the forensics community. Ten extended interviews with both novice and experienced coaches from one AFA designated district were conducted. Interviewees were given the definition of mentor which has been specified earlier in this paper and were asked to respond to a set of open ended questions. The answers received do provide some insight into the current status of forensics mentoring.

Both novice and experienced coaches felt that they had had a forensics mentor when they were getting started. Many, but not all mentors were faculty members at the coaches' home schools. Novice and experienced coaches cited similar types of things when asked what their mentor had done for them ranging from teaching them tournament and budget administration , to introducing them to new people, to helping to develop their coaching philosophies. Although both novice and experienced coaches valued their mentors, experienced coaches attributed more of their satisfaction with and success in coaching to their mentor relationships.

Most novice coaches felt a need for more mentoring. Felt needs tended to fall into the category of tour guide mentoring. Issues related to fitting in and information seeking were mentioned most often. Suggestions for workshops, more instructional and descriptive materials, and more communication with other forensics professionals were often mentioned.

Novice and experienced coaches would favor moves by the forensics community which would result in more formalized

mentoring programs. Neither group of coaches felt that any formal mentoring programs were well established in the forensics community. At the same time, both sets of coaches were careful to point out that their desire for more formal mentoring programs did not mean that they wanted to see any decrease in informal mentoring relationships.

Many experienced coaches felt that they had also served as a mentor to others. Some experienced coaches had sought out the relationship, but others felt that they had been targeted because of their position or reputation. Coaches who felt that they had mentored others also frequently referenced the role of mentor that they serve for their forensics students. Mentor coaches tended to gravitate toward the trusted guide and away from the travel guide metaphor in describing their mentoring activities. Developing self concept, contributing to philosophy building, and promoting decision making skills were types of activities described.

APPLICABILITY OF MENTORING TO FORENSICS PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

In considering the applicability of mentoring to forensics practices and procedures it is first important to note that questions and concerns do exist about both the practice of mentoring and the research conducted to date on mentoring relationships. Merriam's critical review of the mentoring literature (1983) suggests that a number of problems with research designs make any possible conclusions about the importance and effects of mentoring tenuous at best. She includes among the concerns: the use of varying conceptual and

operational definitions of the mentoring construct making comparisons of research findings difficult; the fact that different research methods such as surveys versus interviews appear to produce different research findings; that limited research designs, mainly surveys, have been used with limited samples, often successful executives; and the existence of tenuous links between the existence of mentoring relationships and conclusions about the effects of those relationships. Speizer (1981) and Noe (1988) both conclude that clearly more empirical research is needed to examine the antecedents and consequences of mentoring.

Others have suggested that the possible drawbacks or dangers of mentoring relationships have also not received enough research attention. (Levinson, et. al., 1978) Dangers suggested include mentors who are exploitive, stifling or overprotective, the potential for the mentor to lose power or prestige as a result of the mentoring relationship or dependencies that may develop on the part of the mentoree. Overall, the literature appears to be biased in favor of mentoring relationships (Wilbur, 1987), but any efforts to promote mentoring in the forensics community should clearly be aware of potential problems with mentoring relationships and be committed to the review of any mentoring efforts or programs to assess effects and desirability.

The interviews conducted in 1990 do, however, suggest keeping the following ideas in mind when considering the application of mentoring to forensics practices and procedures.

+Mentoring relationships do already exist in the forensics community.

+Both novice and experienced coaches tend to be positive about the potential benefits of mentoring, but experienced coaches seem to attribute more positive consequences to mentoring than do novice coaches.

+Novice and experienced coaches may clearly assign different values to different types of mentoring practices.

+Both novice and experienced coaches would favor more formal mentoring efforts as long as they did not detract from informal mentoring.

These findings led to three recommendations being offered at the second National Developmental Conference on Individual Events.

First, move to establish, through existing forensics organizations, formal mentoring programs. Advantages would include: more coaches benefiting from mentoring practices, more assurance that the full range of mentoring activities would be offered, and the increased probability for formal evaluation and review of mentoring activities.

Second, move to retain and expand the existence of informal mentoring practices and procedures. This assures that a valued type of mentoring is still maintained and that all coaches are encouraged to consider mentoring.

Third, expand the promotion function which mentoring can serve for less experienced forensics coaches. Promotion practices by mentors can contribute to favorable promotion and tenure decisions on home campuses, increased understanding and

valuing of forensics coaches, and the movement of less experienced coaches into positions in the organizational structure of established forensics organizations.

THE EX-FORENSICS DIRECTOR AS MENTOR

At first glance it might appear that the role of mentor might be an ideal role for Ex-forensics Directors to fill in an attempt to continue to make contributions to the forensics activity. Over the past several months, however, this writer has engaged in semi-nondirected interviews with a variety of active forensics coaches and Ex-forensics Directors which suggest that the fit between mentor role and Ex-forensics Director may not be as good as one might initially think. Additionally the writer has thought about her own experiences as she has made the personal decision to move from serving for many years as a director of several different forensics programs to serving in the role of an Assistant Director.

When individuals become Ex-forensics Directors, it is natural to assume that one advantage they will enjoy that would contribute to a mentor role is the advantage of having additional time. An inherent problem with directing and coaching forensics is the tremendous time pressure involved. Mentoring requires time and active directors simply may not have the time available to develop and maintain mentoring relationships or to engage in mentoring practices and procedures. It is clear to this writer, however, that much more than time is required to assure a successful mentor role for Ex-forensics Directors. The discussion of the following four issues is not intended to be

exhaustive, but rather representative of some of the ideas which need to be considered before a mentor role is promoted for Ex-forensics Directors.

First, this writer would argue that Ex-forensics Directors are not likely to be good mentors unless they were good mentors when they were active forensics directors. Mentoring requires certain skills, skills that are not likely to naturally appear just because an individual is no longer serving as the director. The mentoring research referenced in this paper cites a variety of mentoring skills such as the ability to be supportive, to be open minded, to be able to trust others or to be a good listener. A mentor needs to be able to receive personal satisfaction from the advancement and achievements of others, needs to appreciate the difference between providing options and giving advice and needs the ability to know when to terminate a mentor relationship. The 1990 interviews referenced earlier noted that directors who served as mentors for other coaches were usually individuals who were drawn to and skilled in mentoring. They were individuals who tended to serve as mentors for their students or graduate assistants and who also tended to mentor other teachers and colleagues.

Second, Ex-forensics Directors are not likely to be good mentors unless they are truly ready to relinquish the power and control associated with a director's position. Ex-directors have made the decision to relinquish the title of director. The question that remains is whether they are ready to relinquish the other trappings of the position. They must be ready to move out

of center stage. They must consciously desire for other coaches to be able to have their chance. If these conditions do not exist, it would be all too probable for an ex-director, serving in a mentor role, to usurp a new director's power and prestige. Rather than mentoring the protege, the ex-director may find himself or herself continuing to try to achieve his/her personal goals through their mentoree or mentor relationship. In interviews conducted with active coaches and ex-directors this particular concern was mentioned with some frequency. On several different occasions, references to ex-directors who had not really relinquished the director's role were cited as examples where new coaches had been hurt rather than helped by the mentor relationship with an ex-director.

Third, some Ex-forensics Directors may be effective mentors, but the longevity for the effectiveness of this role may be a concern. The question that needs to be addressed is whether an individual who is no longer actively travelling or coaching can really remain in touch with the activity and consequently serve as an effective mentor. Interviews with active coaches frequently mentioned examples of ex-directors who were "out of touch" with the forensics activity. If ex-directors are to serve in a mentor role it is important to analyze what skills and functions of the director role are truly enduring and resistant to change over time. It is relatively easy to identify some aspects of our activity which change with some frequency such as desirable or necessary tournament and travel schedules, literature for oral interpretation events and some tournament

practices and procedures. We might like to think that some other aspects of the activity are much more enduring like recruiting practices, motivational techniques or squad management practices, but any ex-director serving as a mentor should consistently question the applicability of their experiences to the current status of students, coaches and the forensic activity. At the very least the potential to become outdated reinforces the need for certain mentoring skills such as waiting to be approached for help, describing options as opposed to offering advice, and being flexible and open minded.

Finally, ex-directors will probably not be effective mentors unless they make a concerted effort to be cognizant of potential problems and issues associated with the forensics mentor role, consciously seek to learn about mentoring, and make a commitment to reviewing and evaluating their mentoring relationships and mentoring practices and procedures. Interviews with coaches highlighted a variety of additional issues that deserve consideration by any ex-directors who are considering serving in mentor roles. Some of the concerns expressed include:

+A mentor must know when to let go. The goal of the mentor relationship needs to be developing proteges who will be able to traverse on their own. Mentor relationships should not lead to dependent relationships.

+Female coaches may have special mentoring needs. Women in business organizations have traditionally lacked mentor opportunities because of the dearth of female mentors for up and coming business women and the reluctance of men to serve

as mentors for women. (Sheehy, 1974; Bolton 1980) Ex-directors should consider cross-gender mentor relationships, but also be sensitive to the special complexities involved including sexual tensions, increased public scrutiny and stereotypical male/female roles.

+Mentors must be willing to evaluate the specific nature of each mentor relationship. Directors who have had the opportunity to mentor a coach when they were first serving in an assistant position may have a very different mentor relationship with that individual after stepping down as the director than they would have with an individual that they had not worked with previously. The ex-director may also have to consider such factors as the age differential between the mentor and mentoree, the needs of the mentor and the mentoree, and the power, prestige, and experiences of the mentor and mentoree.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to investigate the potential role of mentor for Ex-forensics Directors. It is the opinion of the author that mentoring is appropriate and desirable for the forensics community. Ex-forensics Directors are a potentially untapped resource for fulfilling this role. Important issues, however, must be considered and addressed if Ex-forensics Directors are to effectively serve as mentors and contribute in that way to the forensics activity.

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